

CYNTHIA AXNE
3RD DISTRICT, IOWA

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September 24, 2021

Mr. Kevin Shea
Administrator
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
4700 River Road
Riverdale, MD 20737

Dear Administrator Shea:

I was recently informed about an alarming example of animal cruelty involving a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) licensed commercial dog breeder in Seymour, Iowa operated by Daniel Gingerich. I am writing to you to ensure that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) fully exercises its authority to enforce the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and protect dogs and puppies from the cruelty of puppy mills.

Publicly available APHIS inspection reports document consistent failures to conduct activity in accordance with requirements set forth by USDA. In 2020, Mr. Gingerich failed to provide an APHIS Animal Care inspector access to his facility on three separate occasions. Repeat failures to make a facility available for inspection alone should have motivated your agency to act. Furthermore, APHIS Animal Care confusingly lists two “new site inspections” as having taken place on March 12th, 2021. One report found no non-compliant items and approved the facility for regulated activity; the other documented a failure to properly store canine vaccines and states the site was, at the time, “not ready for approval to conduct activity covered under your current Animal Welfare Act License.” This fact pattern alone is concerning.

Even more troubling are the inspections that were conducted between April and August 2021. By April, Gingerich had amassed over 20 non-compliant items, but no remedial or enforcement action was taken for several months, despite serious and uncorrected violations- including the presence of deceased dogs on site, multiple dogs in poor health, emaciated dogs and dogs with injuries and illnesses that were left untreated by a veterinarian. To date, Mr. Gingerich has amassed over 100 violations of the AWA.

Over the course of five months, the APHIS Animal Care took no action other than to document a facility that was operating far short of the requirements of the AWA, and animals suffered as a result. While I am relieved to hear that the USDA eventually issued a 21-day suspension of Mr. Gingerich’s license, I remain concerned that much more needs to be done, which is why I am requesting you expedite the disposition of dogs that remain at risk of harm. I further urge you to fully investigate this matter and pursue permanent license revocation or civil monetary penalties, if appropriate.

As a passionate defender of animal welfare and voice for cracking down on puppy mills in Iowa and nationwide, I urge you to redouble agency efforts to fully enforce the AWA. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cindy Axne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cindy" being more prominent than the last name "Axne".

Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

cc: Dr. Jeff Kaisand, State Veterinarian,
Iowa Animal Industry Bureau